

Legal Environment

Finland continued to rank among the freest media environments in the world in 2014. Freedom of expression is protected by Article 12 of the constitution and the 2003 Act on the Exercise of Freedom of Expression in Mass Media. Although journalists and media outlets are generally allowed to operate freely, defamation is considered a crime, and the government actively pursues incidents of defamation of religion or ethnicity. Finnish courts have traditionally treated libel cases as a dispute between the journalist and the subject, without taking into consideration the public's right to receive information on matters of public importance. This practice has been repeatedly contested by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), and the Finnish courts are beginning to adjust their rulings accordingly. In an October 2013 judgment, the ECHR found that television journalists Juha Arvo Mikael Ristamäki and Ari Jukka Korvola had been unfairly convicted of defamation for referring to a well-known Finnish businessman standing trial for economic offenses during a current-affairs program in 2006.

The constitution provides for the freedom of access to information, and the 1999 Act on the Openness of Government Activities created mechanisms for the granting of access to information in the public domain, setting a timeline of two weeks for government bodies to respond to requests. The act includes restrictions on access to information related to foreign affairs, criminal investigations, and national security. In 2009, Finland was among the first countries to sign the Council of Europe Convention on Access to Official Documents, which sets legally binding minimum standards for access to official documents held by public authorities.

The self-regulatory Council for Mass Media (CMM) is responsible for upholding ethical standards across print, broadcast, and online media. The CMM, which is empowered to accept and adjudicate complaints, consists of representatives of the media as well as the public. The maximum sanction in its power is a reprimand that must be published or broadcast immediately. Participation in the CMM is voluntary, but all major media outlets have signed on. Annual membership fees are the basis of CMM funding, although the body may also accept government subsidies to support its operations.

The Finnish Communications Regulatory Authority (FICORA), a branch of the Ministry of Transport and Communications, monitors radio and television actors, grants broadcasting licenses, and supervises compliance with regulations. In November 2014, the parliament approved the Information Society Code, which unifies and updates a number of existing laws governing the operation of telecommunications, security in electronic communications, and the media market. The code contains provisions for the promotion of competition in the media sector, as well as more efficient and secure telecommunications systems. It also expands the powers of FICORA to grant programming licenses to radio and television stations, whereas under previous legislation, the government held the bulk of responsibility for issuing licenses. The code will go into effect in 2015.

Political Environment

The case of Markus Pentikäinen, a photojournalist who was arrested in 2006 while covering a demonstration that had been disbursed by police, continued throughout the year. In 2009, the Finnish Supreme Court had upheld a 2007 conviction against Pentikäinen, finding that he had disobeyed police

orders by remaining in the demonstration area. In February 2014, the ECHR ruled in favor of the Finnish Supreme Court. Pentikäinen was granted a further appeal, however, and the Grand Chamber of the ECHR heard the case in December; deliberations were ongoing at year's end.

Physical harassment of or threats against journalists are extremely rare.

Economic Environment

Despite recent decreases in the circulation of print media, Finland maintains high newspaper readership, ranking first in the European Union and third in the world. Most newspapers are privately owned. Media ownership became concentrated after several mergers in the late 1990s, with Sanoma and Alma Media controlling the majority of newspaper distribution. Sanoma owns the largest daily newspaper, *Helsingin Sanomat*, and the tabloid *Ilta-Sanomat*, as well as a number of television channels and dozens of publications. Alma Media's portfolio includes the major daily newspaper *Aamulehti* and the tabloid *Iltaalehti*. The government grants discretionary subsidies to newspapers and online publications written in minority languages.

The first digital television broadcasts began in Finland in 2001, and the digital switchover was finalized in 2007. The transition was accompanied by the removal of a frequency restriction that had previously limited the number of available channels, and the television landscape has since grown to include a wide range of public and commercial channels. Currently, there are more than 50 commercial channels in addition to four public channels operated by the Yleisradio Oy (YLE), the public service broadcaster. YLE is funded by a public service broadcasting tax, must be accessible to all Finnish citizens regardless of income or place of residence, and provides broadcasting and internet services in the minority languages of Romani, Russian, Sámi, and Swedish, as well as in Latin. There is a high level of diversity in the content produced by both public and private television outlets. However, in August 2014, the Ministry of Transport and Communications reported that the share of Finnish programming has decreased in recent years, while North American television programs have increasingly gained viewership.

In addition to six radio channels with a national reach, YLE also operates 28 regional stations, and there are dozens of commercial stations with national, regional, or local reach. In November 2014, MTV Radiot was launched to handle the media sales of Radio Nova, NRJ, and Nostalgia with the aim of improving the reach of these radio stations to their audiences. The creation of the company was not intended to affect the independent operation, production, or content of the three stations.

Decreasing advertising spending continues to pose a challenge for the media sector, especially for print publications. In July 2014, the government announced a three-year funding program to help media outlets adapt their practices and services to the digital age. The program, which will be administered by the public funding agency Tekes, aims to encourage innovation and help outlets contend with the financial challenges facing the media sector at large.

The internet is open and unrestricted, and more than 92 percent of citizens had access in 2014. Legislation approved in 2010 gave every Finn the right to access a 1Mbps broadband internet connection. In 2008, the government launched the Broadband for All 2015 project with the aim of expanding internet access in Finland, particularly by extending coverage to people living in remote areas. A progress review in November 2014 revealed potential financial difficulties in reaching the coverage target of 99 percent by the end of 2015; the project was ongoing at year's end.